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THE ARTS OF WOOD.

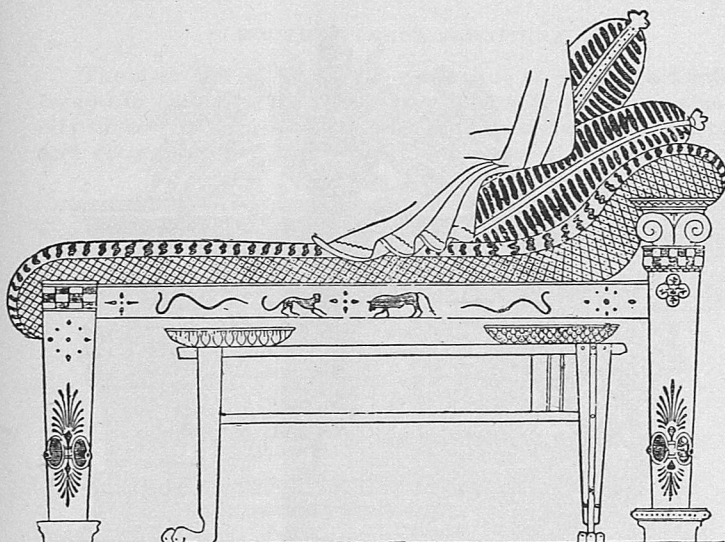
BY ALFRED DE LOSTALOT.

PREHISTORIC WORK.



THE origin of the art and industry of wrought wood is lost in the darkness of time. Primitive man, naturally inclined by the care for existence to make use of everything that fell into his hands, quickly learned how to turn to account the branches of the forest trees that sheltered him. And as wood is one of the chief materials that offers the least resistance to labor, he could easily trace thereon the first manifestations of that taste which is innate in the human species. Axe heads and arrow cylinders have been discovered bearing symmetrical grooves, and occasionally naive designs equalling the brilliancy of silex. Cer-

tain figures engraved on the shoulder blades or horns of reindeer bear testimony to the rapid progress in the path of art. Artistic taste is not necessarily the product of a state of advanced civilization; our forefathers were familiar with this sentiment at an epoch when they lived in a state of complete barbarism.



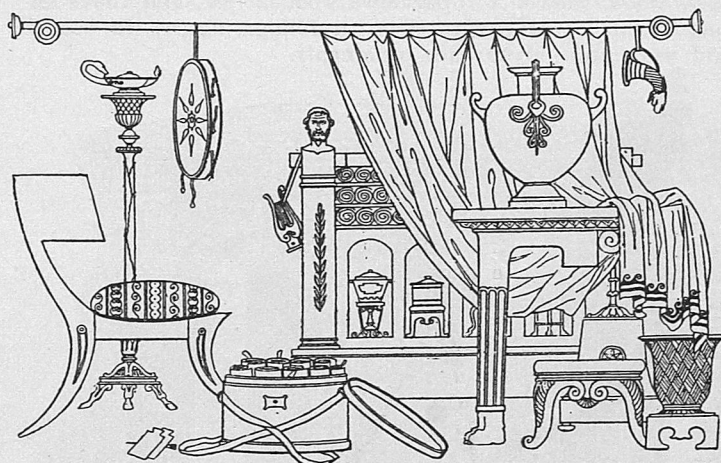
GREEK BEDSTEAD AND TABLE.

We have just shown, summarily, the origin of drawing and engraving; that of sculpture must be contemporary. The first monuments we know of are the coarse idols made of one block of wood, scarcely squared, or of a simple carved plank such as has been discovered at Délos. We can picture to ourselves what must have been the furniture of those inhabitants of the caverns and cities of the plains! All ancient nations resemble each other; to prove this one has only to consult the accounts of travelers concerning the customs of the savage hordes which are still scattered throughout certain countries of the globe.

EGYPTIAN FURNITURE.

Setting aside the prehistoric ages, concerning which our knowledge is entirely recent, and, consequently, not very extensive, we come to the study of the most ancient civilization, or, at least, the most remote of which we have any definite knowledge. At this period documents abound. Egypt has bequeathed to us a great number of works created by her artists and workmen; on the other hand she has taken care to engrave on the walls of her temples and in the interior of her tombs a complete history of her manners and customs; therefore, there is no gap to fill in here. From the study of these divers documents it follows that the Egyptians were particularly skillful in the art of wood carving. The most ancient statues extant are precisely those of wood collected on Egyptian soil; and one ad-

mires the deep sentiments of life and realism with which they are impregnated. As to articles of furniture they are not less remarkable; to elegance of control they join the richness and care of decoration; some are inlaid with faience, enamel, ivory and ebony, or decorated with fine paintings. One sees in various museums, especially the Louvre, all sorts of furniture: beds, chairs, foot-stools, folding chairs, terminating in the feet of a



A ROMAN STUDY, SHOWING SCROLLS IN SCRINIUM, CHAIR, WRITING TABLE, CANDELABRUM, ETC.

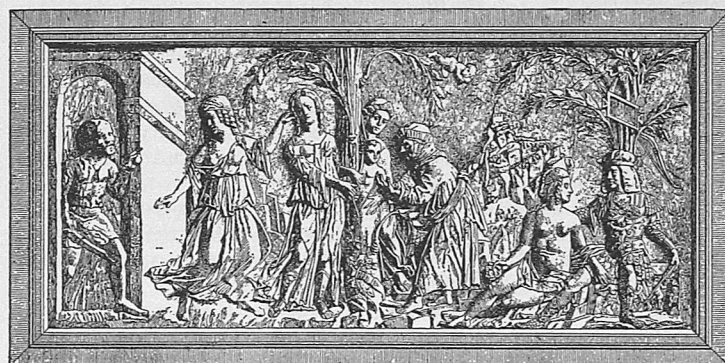
lion, bull, or gazelle; the raised parts bear the heads of these animals. As for the mummy coffins they are of excellent ebony work, decorated with much elegance. The Egyptians of the first ages were inspired by nature; later on they submitted to the decorative laws established by religion, or permitted themselves to imitate the arts of the stranger. This was the origin of their decadence.

FURNITURE IN ASSYRIA AND BABYLON.

The productions of ancient Assyria in the wood art are very rare, but there have been discovered some magnificent plaques of casing, sculptured in bronze and ivory, which give an idea of the luxurious furniture hoarded up in the palaces of the kings Achéménés at Susa and Ecbatana. The forms and decorations of utensils in common use and of furniture are almost the same in Assyria and Babylon, which is explained by the constant relation maintained between the two countries. It is the same with divers objects found in Phœnicia and Palestine; they bear at the same time the impress of the two great nations which, in turn, dominated these countries. Judea was, besides, a thoroughfare for the caravans which traveled from Egypt and a part of India to the villages of Asia Minor.

GREECE.

Greece, in the beginning a tributary of the Orient, had no national art until the day when her political independence was well established. The first statues which she erected in her

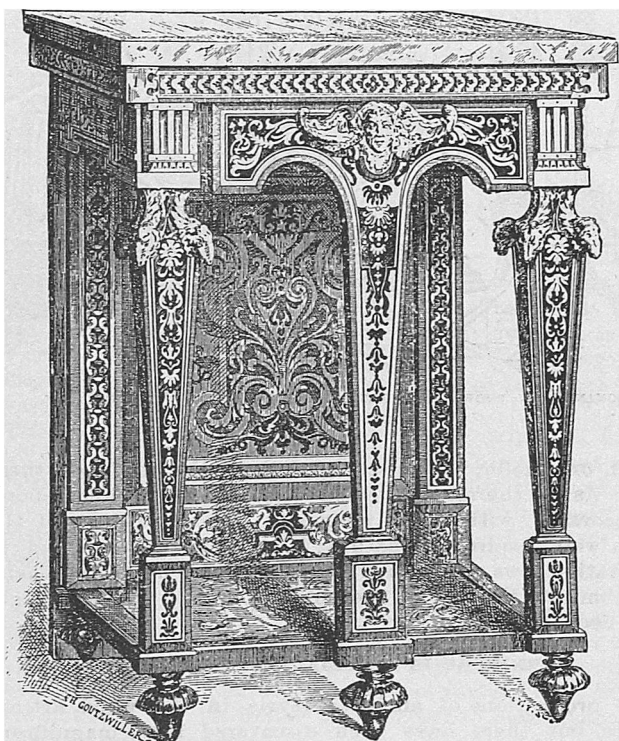


CARVED WOOD PANEL, ITALIAN, OF THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY.

temples were of wood. We find in Homer pompous descriptions which give a high idea of the richness of the material employed in the construction and decoration of thrones, tripods, chairs and beds. But all these are for the most part of brass. In the

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time of Pausanias there was a question, for the first time, of real artistic furniture in wood concerning a chest of sculptured cedar in the treasury of Olympia. The tombs of Bosphore Cimmerien have, happily, restored to us some beautiful specimens of the wood art of evident Greek production. These remains testify to the taste and skill of the artisans of the IVth century, the epoch in which they were revived, there is a tripod of cypress wood, the central part of a wooden lyre, and above all a magnificent coffin decorated with foliage, figures in relief, inlaid work and polychromic ornaments.



BOULE CONSOLE IN MARQUETRY, SEVENTEENTH CENTURY.
(MUSEE DU LOUVRE.)

ROME.

The Romans, direct inheritors and propagators of Grecian civilization, have carried to the highest point luxury in articles of furniture. We have precious information on this subject in the recitals of Pliny the Elder; and besides, the excavations in Italy, especially those which bordered on the resurrection of Herculaneum and Pompeii, have brought forth such a quantity of intact objects and ruins that it is easy to reconstitute the interior life of the Romans in all its details.

To tell the truth, there are few among these objects which belong to the subject of which we are treating. Among the Romans, as among the Greeks, their masters, who had continued to furnish them with models and artists, wood often played but a secondary role in the manufacture of furniture: beds, tables, chairs and tripods, still in existence, are made of cast bronze, or of plaques resting on a framework of wood. Without doubt the art of the cabinetmaker and carver should have produced equally remarkable results—the evidence of Pliny and Cicero prove this—but the specimens are very rare. Italy, so often ravaged by war, which bears in its train pillage and conflagration, beheld everything perishable destroyed.

The Roman style, derived from the Grecian, resembles it in so much that it is often difficult to determine the real origin of an object; besides, as we have stated, in prosperous Rome the arts and industries were more frequently in the hands of Greeks expatriated voluntarily or by force. However, the furniture of this epoch is absolutely remarkable from the double point of view of elegance and commodity. The Romans were familiar for the most part with the furniture in use to-day, unless, perhaps, bureaus; and from them we have borrowed certain designs almost literally.

CHURCH FURNITURE.

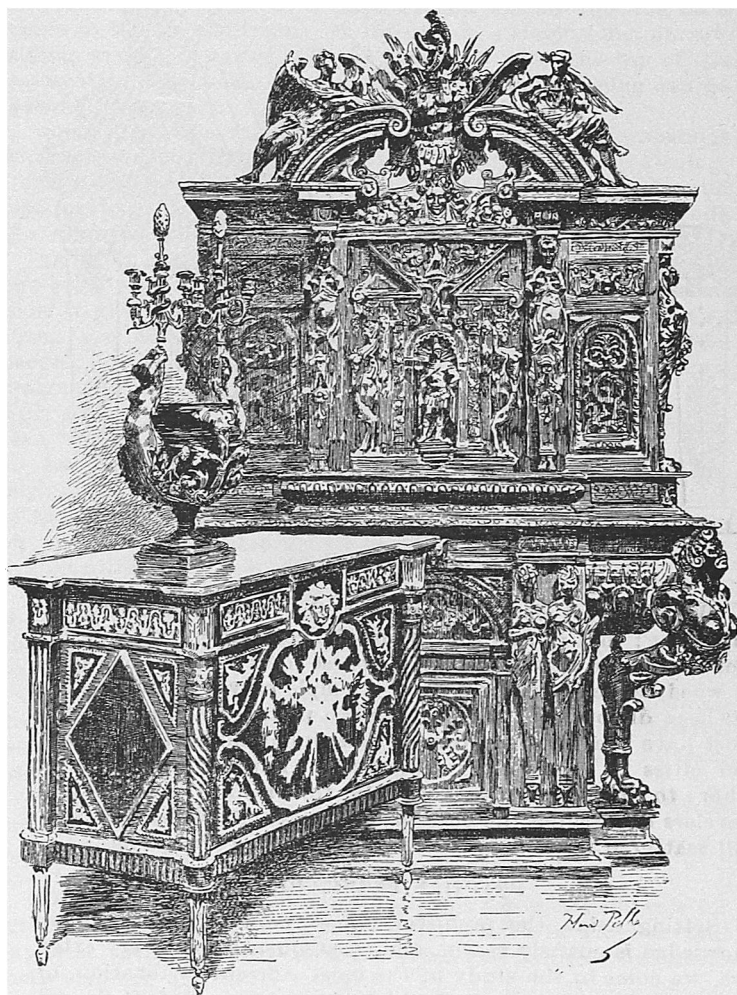
Church furniture during the first centuries of Christianity preserves clearly the artistic traditions of paganism; but the

art itself declined with the fall of the Roman empire. The invasions of the barbarians accomplished the destruction of all that the artists of the new religion left standing. However, the foundation of Byzantium, by Constantine, offered a last refuge to the masterpieces of the past, and to the artists who were capable of creating new ones. When the empire of the Orient declined in turn under the attacks of other barbarians, the definite conquest of Constantinople by the Turks in 1453 was not an irreparable misfortune. It took place too late to deal a positive blow to ancient civilization. A renaissance had already sprung into being in a part of Europe, which renewed the chain of traditions, and saved the world from barbarism.

EARLY FRENCH FURNITURE.

We know nothing of the Gauls previous to the Roman conquest; however, the quality of certain objects found in tombs established the fact beyond a doubt that they had already reached an advanced state of civilization. Conquered, they rapidly assimilated the customs of the conquerors.

There is a *fauteuil* preserved in the national library said to have belonged to Dagobert. It is a curule chair, Roman style, in gilded bronze, to which the back was added some centuries later. During the epochs that followed art was greatly impeded by continual wars, and it did not assume an original character in France until the day when there was a central force strong enough to guarantee the security of the population. Later on the renaissance of the lay corporations during the XII century enfranchised the hieratic forms preserved in convents. From this epoch date the truly notable manifestations of our national genius purified from all foreign alloy.



RENAISSANCE BUFFET AND LOUIS XVI. CONSOLE. BY BEURDELEY.

It frequently occurs that an ungainly piece of furniture is decorated with magnificent ornaments in wrought iron, which demonstrates that the iron art was considerably in advance of that of furniture. This art was at its apogee during the XIII. century.

The first "huchiers" we know of are Jehan le Mestre and Grandin. Primitively associated with the carpenters they soon

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formed a distinct body, and this positive mancipation was the sign of a veritable renovation in artistic furniture and wrought wood. At this period begins the creation of those magnificent altar screens and choir stalls which ornament our ancient cathedrals.

In manorial dwellings up to the close of the XV. century there was little known of any save portable furniture. The master in changing his residence took everything with him in trunks which were transported on chariots or on horseback. Oak was mostly used in the construction of these chests on account of its solidity, and the articles of furniture were so made as to be easily taken apart.

THE BEGINNING OF CABINET-MAKING.

The art of the cabinet maker commences with the XVI. century. Until this period artists had limited themselves to decorating wood first with ornamental designs, then with medallions in relief and figures in pointed niches more or less ornamented. It was the domain of the joiner and wood carver to establish furniture. For style they imitated the admirable work with which the stone cutters decorated the porticos of churches. Besides, at all times, furniture has been more or less dependent on architecture, as cabinet-makers have always borrowed its essential forms and the character of its decoration.

For the various reasons which we have summarily given, carvings in wood and furniture manufactured prior to the XVI. century are extremely rare. There are magnificent specimens preserved in churches and museums, but private collections are very few, or, at least one encounters among them only articles of doubtful authenticity.

MODERN FRENCH FURNITURE.

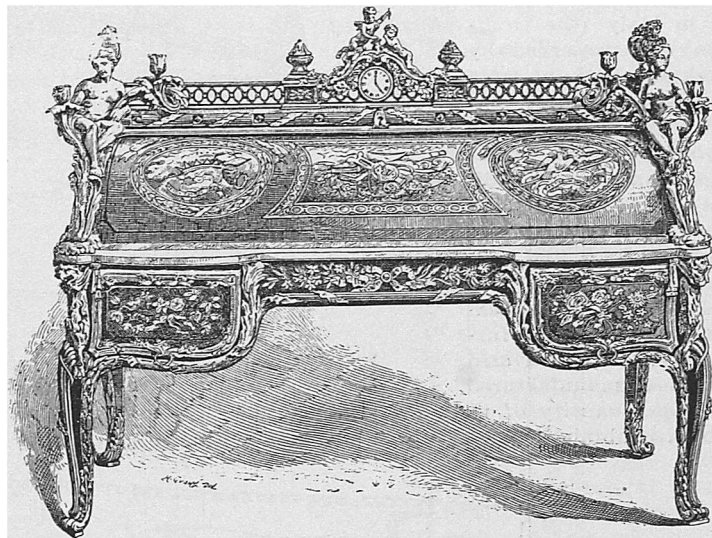
The first half of the XVI. century is an epoch particularly fecund in the history of the art. There is not a province or city of any importance whatever but can boast of sculptors and decorators of every class; and many of the works which



WALNUT TABLE, STYLE, HENRY II. (MUSEE DE COMPIEGNE.)

France has bequeathed us at this epoch are of absolute perfection as much from the point of view of elaborate workmanship as for the exquisite taste with which it is set off. In the woodwork of which we are especially treating great progress has been accomplished; the workmen commence to make a tour through France; their taste and their technical skill are

developed on beholding what is going on outside of their small industrial centre; they profit by the lessons of the stranger without abdicating before him, as they will unfortunately do later on. Art becomes impregnated with a German sentiment then again with an Italian sentiment, but never ceases to be French; the comparison develops the critical sense of our natives and they profit on beholding the field of their artistic faculties enlarging at the same time with a sensible refining of their taste.



BUREAU DU ROI. MADE FOR LOUIS XV. BY RIESENER.

Although these migrations of workmen have brought a certain confusion into the reigning styles of France, it is possible to determine the geographical origin of the greater part of the wood carvings and furniture of the Renaissance. Certain characteristics common to the neighboring schools do not hinder in most cases from drawing up the certificate of birth; we find in their description marks peculiar to such and such a group, the whole of which is equal to a document of origin. Space will not permit us to enlarge upon this subject; we must limit ourselves to general information. The furniture of Normandy, for instance, is distinguished by its firmness of execution and the particularly dramatic character of its forms. The workmen of the North of France used the oak almost exclusively in their work; the ruggedness of this substance is not in harmony with the delicacy of the implements. Those of Burgundy and the South employed more pliant material, and were consequently enabled to indulge in all decorative fancies and to give to their productions a finish of execution which reminds one of chased metal. The school of Touraine, influenced by the example given by the artists and workmen brought from Italy by Charles VIII. and his successors, sacrifices all to elegance, and borrows its subjects from classical antiquity.

During the second half of the XVI. century, the composition of furniture is borrowed from the edifices raised by architects: Jean Bullant, Pierre Lescot and Philibert Delorme furnish the designs. Artists took inspiration for the forms from the carved works of Jean Goujon, which, on account of their graceful elongated shapes, offered admirable facilities for the decoration of furniture. The school surnamed Fontainebleau, with which many Parisian artists are familiar, has produced marvels of this kind.

The art of wood engraving flourished at Lyons; the carvers and cabinet-makers take their models from designs of masters such as: Pierre Woeriot and Bernard Salomon; the articles of furniture are inlaid à l'italienne, or decorated with arabesque carvings in relief. On the other hand the neighborhood of Burgundy manifests itself by the introduction into Lyonnese furniture of those powerful and distorted carvings: masks, caryatids, satyrs, etc., which its school, famous among all others, carried to the point of abuse.

ITALIAN FURNITURE.

Italy, more favored than we on account of her geographical situation, has been enabled to maintain constant relations with the Orient; consequently, her Renaissance dates further back than ours. However, we cannot complain since our prolonged

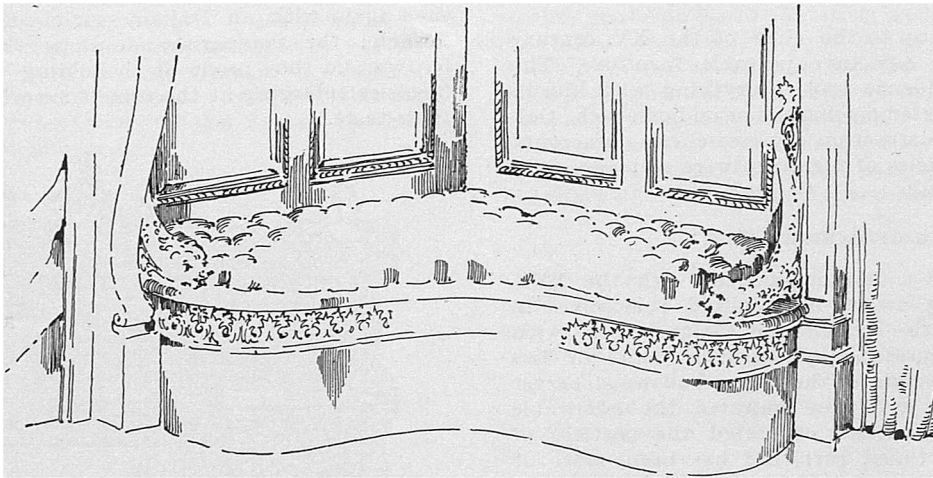
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gnorance of the achievements of the Greeks and Romans has produced a magnificent efflorescence of national genius to which bear testimony the architecture of our ancient churches, the miniatures of our manuscripts, and the rare specimens of our industrial arts during the middle ages.

Mosaic work, which has never ceased to exist in Italy (the tradition was preserved by workmen brought from Byzantium) had a decided influence on the style of Italian furniture; that of the basilicas was decorated with wood mosaics colored to imitate the glass mosaics on the walls. The polychromic taste extended to domestic furniture. Sienna and Florence manufactured a large quantity of those coffers or *cassoni*, the decoration of which is obtained by painting and engraving rather than by

have affixed their names to them, while the most famous painters did not disdain to decorate chests, trunks, tables and other articles of domestic furniture.

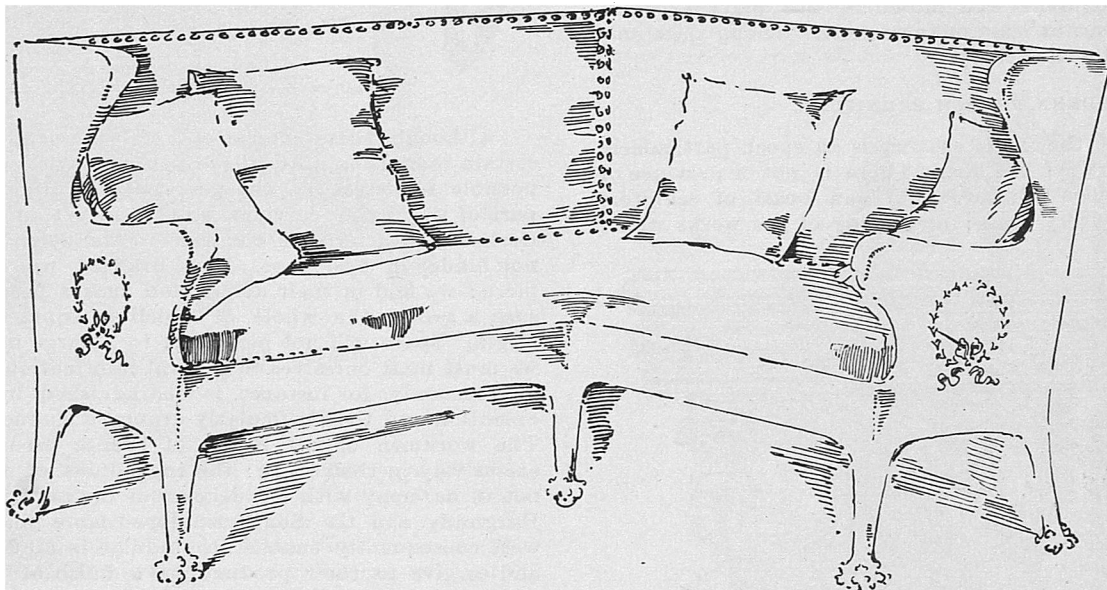
In the XVI. century wood carving was considerably developed in the manufacture of Italian furniture; of this epoch there are still in existence coffers, chairs, mirror-frames, etc., worked with exquisite taste. Italy has produced and still contains practitioners of consummate skill; unfortunately she has no longer the artists of former days. Her modern work in wood, like that in marble, is only commendable for its finish. It is the triumph of perfect polish, but art is lacking.



ROMANESQUE WINDOW SEAT. DESIGNED BY H. SCHIER, JR. AND EXECUTED BY C. A. HUTCHINGS.

SPAIN.

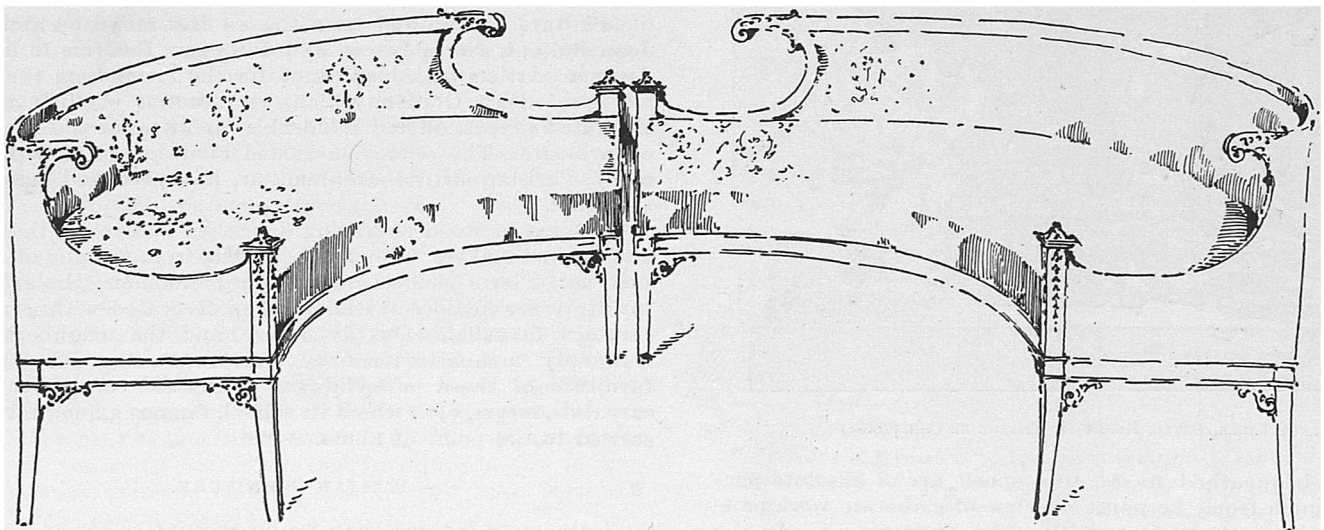
The history of wrought wood in Spain is not yet written;



ROMANESQUE CORNER SEAT. DESIGNED BY H. SCHIER, JR. AND EXECUTED BY C. A. HUTCHINGS.

carving. We find sculptured mosaics in the doors and choir wainscoting of certain churches of the Peninsula. Contrary

we know, however, that the Moors carried the arts of relief and decoration to an astonishing perfection. The conquerors and



TWIN DIVAN IN THE ADAM STYLE, FOR CIRCULAR BAY WINDOW. DESIGNED BY H. SCHIER, JR., AND EXECUTED BY C. A. HUTCHINGS.

to our custom, the authors of these magnificent works are known; the greatest sculptors of the XIII. and XIV. centuries

those subjected to their laws soon blended and from this fusion a mixed style originated, Moorish and Christian at the same

time, in which the decorative sentiment of the two races was amalgamated. Later on when Spain had definitely expelled the invaders who had ruled her for several centuries, the Renaissance was accomplished as in all the countries of Europe.

From the XV. to the end of the XVI. century, date those marvellous wainscotings that are so much admired in the churches of Spain. It must be said that all is not due to Spanish genius. Many famous French, Italian and Flemish artists were called to Spain by her Catholic kings.

GERMANY.

In Germany, wood carving dates back to very distant periods. The first carved figures appeared on furniture during the XIII. century; until then artists had limited themselves to decorative sketches or ornaments in relief. The German art is distinguished by a certain ruggedness, a naturalistic sentiment; the somewhat heavy forms lack elegance, but the carvings are very lively.

FLANDERS.

Wood carving in Flanders presents a slight analogy to the German art; it is the natural result of a geographical neighborhood. The Flemish have produced numberless quantities of carved furniture, especially during the XV. century; and as travel was easy for them we find everywhere traces of their workmanship. They also knew how to appropriate to themselves the style of the various countries in which they labored, thus rendering the task of the historian and the critic a very difficult one.

FRENCH XVII. AND XVIII. CENTURY FURNITURE.

At the beginning of the XVII. century the severe style of the joiner-carvers of the Renaissance was definitely abandoned in the manufacture of furniture. Luxurious articles became the rule; decoration passed from the carvers to the cabinet-makers, who called to their assistance engravers, locksmiths, sheath-makers, goldsmiths, gilders and upholsterers. They used exotic woods, casings of hard stone, various inlaid works, stamped leather, engraved or embossed metals. The antique side-board made way for the cupboard and closet; the copper and shell inlaid work which made Boule's name famous shows us his first attempts. Furniture under Louis XIII. was affected by Flemish taste. France recovered her originality some years later, and she it was who, in the XVIII. century, imposed her taste on all Europe.

The bed, somewhat neglected up to this period, begins to assume an important place in furniture; the alcove style is now introduced into the abodes of the rich; here the cabinet-maker plays but a secondary role; the decoration of the bed belongs to the upholsterer, who soon claims the chairs and couches.

The name of Boule appears in the expenditures of the royal buildings from the year 1673. The sumptuous furniture we owe to him commands to-day exorbitant prices; there are certainly

some masterpieces of upholstery among the collection, but these are open to criticism from an artistic standpoint. However, the great name of Boule predominates in the history of furniture under Louis XIV.

During the first years of the XVIII. century the style leans towards the veneering of satin-woods, embellished by chased copper, which is naturally of a lighter taste. The reign of the carver is about to recommence, but his art is applied less to wood than to bronze except in certain articles of furniture, as tables, brackets, candlesticks, which are still made of carved wood, gilded, of course, to resemble metal.

On the other hand the lace of China and Japan are eagerly sought after for furniture decorations, and as they are very costly, men tax their ingenuity to invent varnishes to substitute them, which will admit of a decoration more in harmony with

the general taste, such as pastorals, love scenes, mythological episodes. The Martins have decorated in this way a quantity of furniture, especially Sedan chairs. The same style of furniture is manufactured in our days as during the reign of Louis XV.; the passing infatuation of which Japan was the object in these later years has brought again into use the Martin varnish.

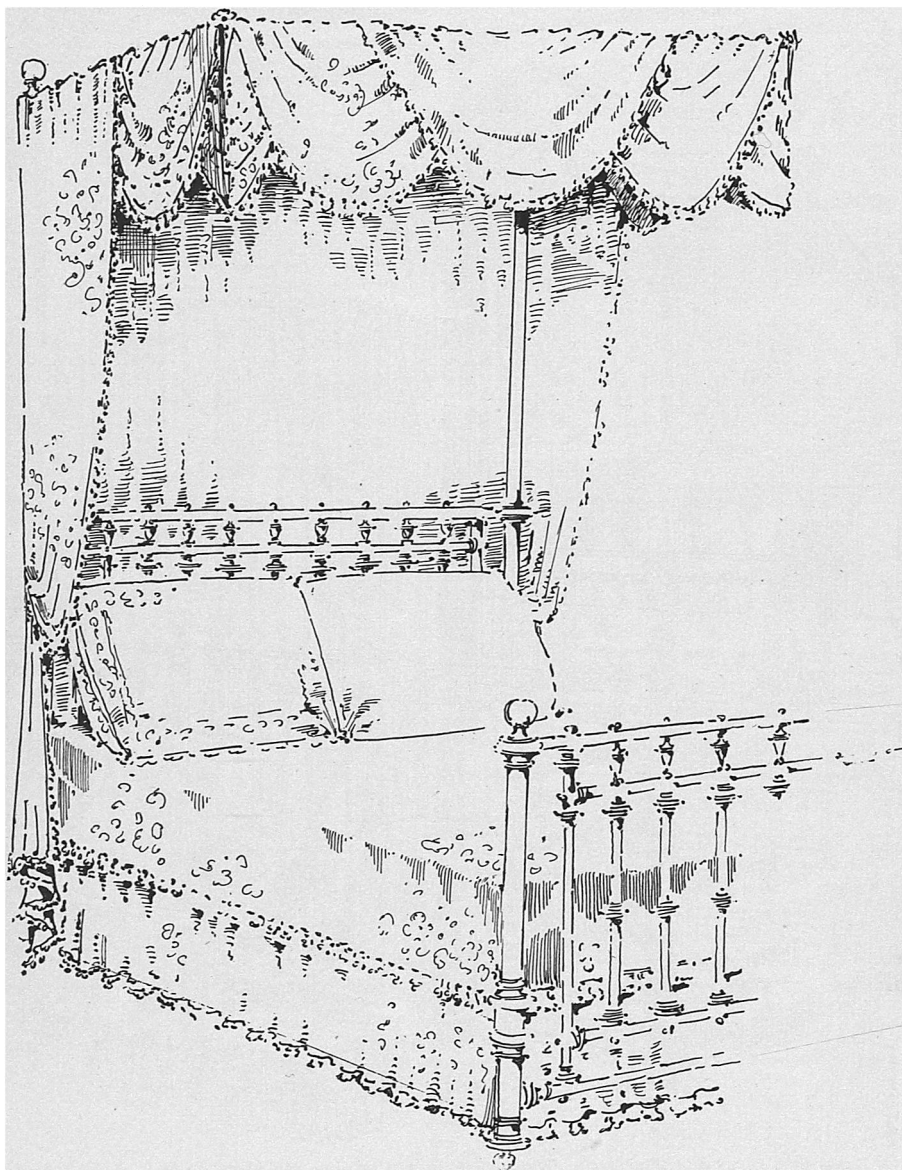
History has collected the ever celebrated names of the sculptors who ornamented with admirable bronzes the furniture of the XVIII. century. The Caffieri, Pierre Lepautre, Charles Cressent and Gouthière, are the most illustrious; next in rank is Riesener, who shared their glory. We are under obligations to him for incomparable masterpieces. Riesener carried the art of furnishing to the highest degree of perfection, and it is not without reason that amateurs wrangle by dint of money for the simplest work that bears his name.

Under the Republic and up to the commencement of the Empire, the Louis XV. style prevailed, but the great practitioners were either dead or they had emigrated. At the same time there was a kind of renaissance, that is a return to the imitation of the antique;

we already find the first signs at the close of the reign of Louis XVI.

EMPIRE FURNITURE.

The grace and exquisite fancy, which had made the name of French furniture so famous, disappeared; under the pretext of simplicity, austerity,—furniture was made heavy, massive, ungraceful and ridiculously pretentious. Mahogany had sprung into popular favor during the preceding century and was now universally used. During his campaigns in Egypt and Italy, Bonaparte acquired a false admiration for the past. He and the painter David were the principal authors of the sudden change. He ordered the architects Percier and Fontaine to design for the national palace antique decorations and furniture. The new style was established; it prevailed without any



BRASS BED WITH CANOPY. DESIGNED BY H. SCHIER, JR., AND EXECUTED BY C. A. HUTCHINGS.

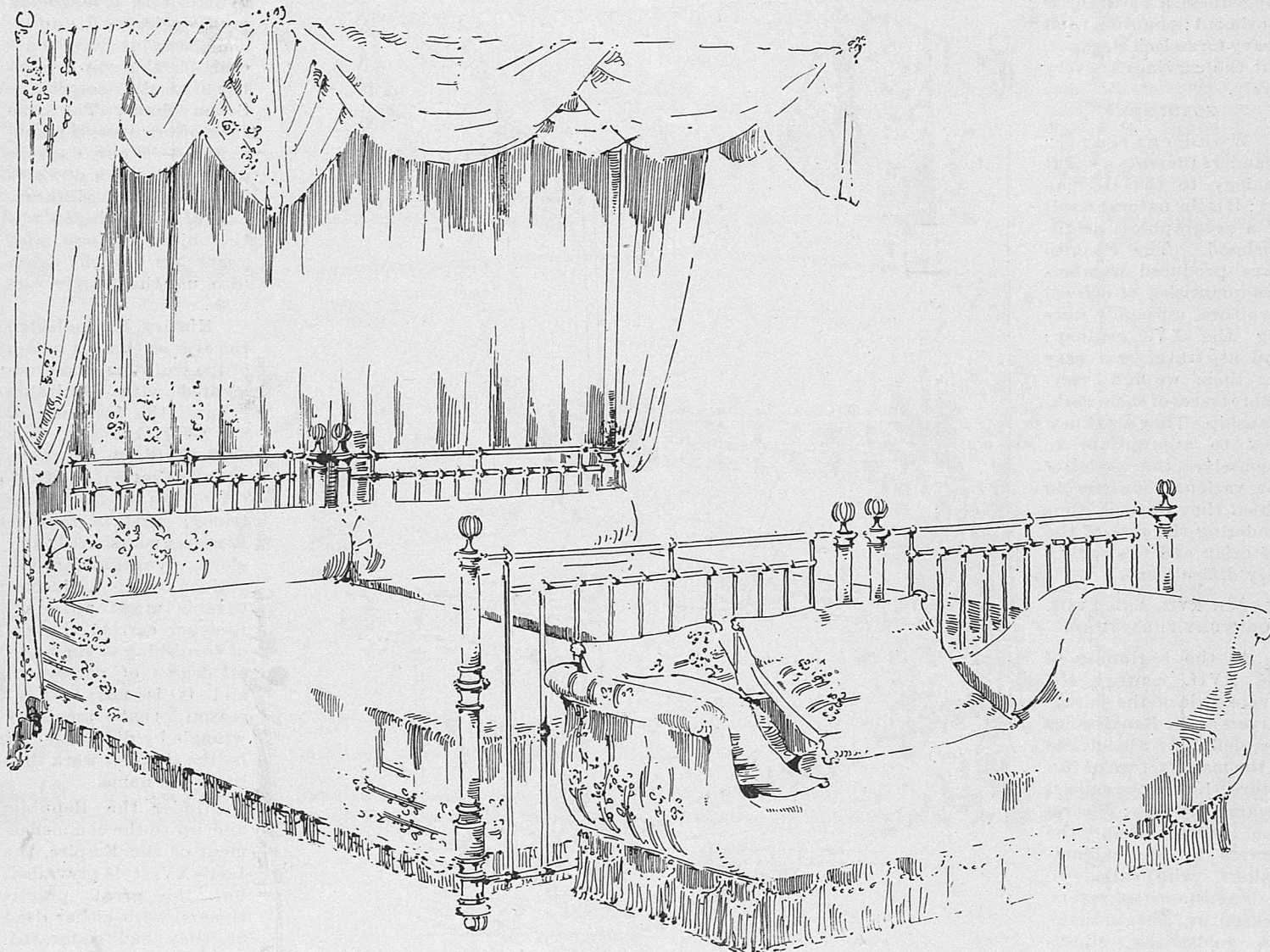
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important change in its general character until the end of Louis Philippe's reign.

THE SECOND EMPIRE STYLE.

Towards the end of the Second Empire the style of the XVIII. century came again into favor; what remained of this epoch, so glorious in the history of French art, was eagerly sought after, and the cabinet makers to satisfy their customers taxed their skill to copy the beautiful models scattered throughout our museums and national palaces. In addition to this, the people of our day delight in the imitation of the past. If it be true that our creative faculties seem to repose it is the fault of our rich amateurs; we know they are unfortunately not much given to encourage innovations. The wood industry and all industrial arts are at the mercy of capital; consequently the man has yet to appear who, by imposing his taste on that of the public, will create the XIX. century style.

better suited than mahogany, the Renaissance style demanding clean cut work. Besides, mahogany possesses a warm, affectionate color, which is very suitable for the dining-room, suggesting to the coming guest welcome and good cheer. Having decided on the wood, we shall anticipate the color which age produces by exposing it to light before attempting the finishing; this will produce the desired effect, and aid in the selection of a harmonious color combination. The panelled space above the wainscoting should be filled with decorative painted tapestry, with scroll and foliage designs, worked with an occasional figure. In general, the background of the apartment should be of a deep old blue, on which the ornamentation should be in orange and old gold. The frieze panels should be in plastic relief, or flat castings in blue and gold, with softer diminishing tones in the cornice. Plastic relief should also be used for the ceiling panels, which are framed in mahogany beams, with a painted



TWIN BRASS BED, DIVAN AND DRAPERIES. DESIGNED BY H. SCHIER, JR., AND EXECUTED BY C. A. HUTCHINGS.

RENAISSANCE DINING-ROOM.

By A. MOORMAN.



SKETCH for a Renaissance dining-room, on page 137 is for a moderate sized apartment. The sideboard forms the principal constructive feature. The large arched doorway leading to the hall has sliding doors, concealed by draperies. The wall, beside the sideboard, contains a fireplace. The sidewall directly opposite the hall doorway has a large triple window, overlooking a picturesque landscape.

For delicate workmanship and choice detail no wood is

tapestry in the centre panel, having fruits and flowers entwined in ornamental scrollage, in which reds and yellow may be used with blue and gold. The electric brackets on the walls should be of antique copper, and the same metal should compose the hardware of the room, comprising the trimmings of the sideboard.

The drapery should be of heavy material hung in plain folds. Velvets in Venetian, or wine reds may be affected, with gold and yellow embroideries. The floor of cherry, should have the border of alternating strips of cherry, walnut and mahogany, and may be covered in the centre with a large Persian rug, in which the various colors in the room might have play. The panels in the upper sideboard doors should be of clear glass, the lead lines being copper-plated.

Altogether, the richest effects which the best skilled artists of modern times are capable of producing are embodied in this style of the American Renaissance.